Aelius Donatus

(fl. Mid-4th Century)

BRIEFING

Aelius Donatus (English: /doʊˈneɪtəs/; fl. mid-fourth century AD) was a Roman grammarian and teacher of rhetoric.

He once taught Jerome, an early Christian Church father who is most known for his translation of the Bible into Latin, known as the Latin Vulgate. Newer revisions of the Vulgate are still in common use by the Catholic Church.

WORKS

He was the author of a number of professional works, of which several are extant:

- Ars maior – A commentary on Latin grammar.
- Ars minor – A commentary on parts of Latin Speech.
- Commentvm Terenti, Publii Terentii Comoediae Sex with preface de tragoedia et comoedia (Commentary on Terence, Six Comedies of Terence with the preface About Tragedies and Comedies) – A commentary on the playwright Terence and all six of his plays, probably compiled from other commentaries. The preface is a commentary on the "proper" structures of Tragedies and Comedies by Donatus titled, "About Comedies and Tragedies." It has never been translated to English as parts are missing from the original manuscript. It has partially been translated to German.
- Explicatio in Ciceronis De inventione (An Explanation of the Cicero's De Inventione)
- Vita Vergili (Life of Virgil) is thought to be based on a lost *Vita* by Suetonius, together with the preface and introduction of his commentary on Virgil's works. A greatly expanded version of Servius' commentary exists, however, which is supplemented with frequent and extensive extracts from what is thought to be Donatus' commentary on Virgil.
    - Since the book is supposedly based on a Vita by Suetonius, it is also often titled *Vita Suetonii vulgo Donatiana* ["The Life [of Virgil], [actually] by Suetonius, [but] commonly called 'by Donatus'"], or *Vita Suetoniana-Donatiana*.

Donatus was a proponent of an early system of punctuation, consisting of dots placed in three successively higher positions to indicate successively longer pauses, roughly equivalent to the modern comma, colon, and full stop. This system remained current through the seventh century, when a more refined system created by Isidore of Seville gained prominence.

In "About Comedy and Tragedy" in his Commentary on Terence, Donatus was the first person known to document the system whereby a play is made up of three separate parts: protasis, epitasis, and catastrophe.

Aelius Donatus should not be confused with Tiberius Claudius Donatus, also the author of a commentary (*Interpretationes*) on the *Aeneid*, who lived about 50 years later.

DONATUS AUCTUS

During the Renaissance, Donatus' *Vita Vergili* is often collected in anthologies of ancient literature. The humanists had interpolated other materials into the *Vita Vergili* to add details and fill in gaps, and these interpolations are collectively called *Donatus auctus* ["the augmented Donatus"]. *Donatus auctus* was added some time around 1426–37, between the first and second redactions of the *De scriptoribus illustribus latinae linguae* ["On Famous Writers of the Latin Language"] of Sicco Polenton, and it became the standard account of Virgil's life up until the 18th century.

The text and translation is found in Ziolkowski and Putnam (2008: II.A.37, 345–69), with italics for the *Donatus auctus* and non-italics for *Vita Vergili*.

See for an evolutionary tree for all the versions of *Vita Vergili*.

This *Vita* depicted Vergil as a wise scholar and expert in science, while disregarding the anecdotes portraying Vergil as a magician, which were added during the medieval period in other *Vita*.

Donatus auctus contains one oft-quoted poem "sic vos non vobis", which was recorded in Codex Salmasianus. See section 251, 252 in I.1 of *Latin Anthology* (B. G. Teubner, 1982). The version recorded in Codex Salmasianus contained just two lines; it was expanded into 5 lines in *Donatus auctus*.